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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Visit of U.S. Special Envoy Sen. George Mitchell to Israel, PA

Key stories in the media:

All media highlighted the killing of IAF Captain Assaf Ramon yesterday when the F-16A Falcon jet he was flying crashed during a routine training flight. He was the son of Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut, who died during the disastrous Earth reentry of the NASA space shuttle Columbia in 2003. Israel Radio reported that

PM Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Special Envoy Senator George Mitchell will be attending Assaf Ramon's funeral this afternoon, and that today's meeting between the two was put off until tomorrow. Media also reported that Mitchell visited the Ramon family home yesterday.

HaQaretz quoted PM Netanyahu as saying at yesterday's cabinet meeting that differences remain with the U.S. over the conditions necessary to resume peacemaking. Netanyahu said he hopes to narrow the gaps between the two sides during his meeting with Mitchell. HaQaretz quoted Mitchell as saying during his meeting with President Shimon Peres that the purpose of his visit is to reach agreement on any outstanding issues and that reported that the dispute had been resolved are premature. Media reported that the Special Envoy also met with DM Ehud Barak and FM Avigdor Lieberman. Maariv said that the latter is not involved in the current diplomatic contacts.

Yediot cited the assessment of high-ranking diplomatic sources that the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will resume in a matter of weeks as part of the expected three-way summit between Netanyahu, PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and President Obama. Yediot cited the prevalent view of diplomatic sources that Mitchell will eventually succeed in obtaining from Netanyahu assent to temporarily freeze construction in settlements in exchange for normalization of relations with Israel on the part of Arab states. The Jerusalem Post actually reported that Saudi Arabia is stepping up its boycotting of Israel: Riyadh's boycott-related requests of American companies rise more than 76%.

Leading media reported that yesterday in Cairo, Netanyahu and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak discussed Mideast peacemaking, according to a statement from Netanyahu's office. It said all sides -- Israel, the Palestinians, Arab nations and the international community -- must do their part in advancing the peace process, an apparent reference to gestures the Arab world might offer in exchange for a settlement freeze.

Netanyahu also discussed Egypt's attempts to mediate a prisoner swap between Israel and Hamas. Yediot reported that Vice PM and Interior Minister Eli Yishai handed Mubarak a letter from Shas's spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, urging him to use his influence to have Gilad Shalit released. HaQaretz reported that Mubarak spokesman Suleiman Awad told the state-run ME NA news agency that Mubarak asked Netanyahu to halt Israeli construction in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, to lift restrictions on Palestinians, and to quickly resume peace talks. HaQaretz reported that Israeli and Palestinian officials denied the report published in yesterday's newspaper quoting unnamed European diplomats as saying that borders would be drawn between Israel and a Palestinian state to be established within two years while major outstanding issues would remain unresolved.

The Jerusalem Post reported that today Vice PM Silvan Shalom will hold a press conference with the far-Right Council of Rabbis of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank].

HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday settlers and security forces clashed at the northern West Bank outpost of Havat Gilad. The clashes broke out following an attempt by security forces to confiscate a truck which was supposedly used to illegally transport a mobile home to the site. Dozens of right-wing activists who came to the site to try to prevent the truck from being moved, punctured the tires of military vehicles, hurled stones, and set fire to a nearby Palestinian-owned olive orchard. One man was injured and four were arrested. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that, in a toast ahead of the Jewish New Year, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi made conciliatory remarks in the direction of the settlers.

Maariv reported that the Israeli Foreign Ministry is bracing for the publication of the U.N. Human Rights Council-appointed fact-finding mission to investigate international human rights and humanitarian law violations related to Operation Cast Lead. The Jerusalem Post reported that British and Canadian lawyers, together with the U.N. watchdog QUN Watch, are complaining the week of alleged bias in the commission.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Israel's National Security Council will function as a command reporting to the prime minister.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Sheikh Salam al-Hozziel from Rahat, the only Bedouin city in Israel, who has been active on the campaign for the release of Gilad Shalit and whose house was subsequently burned down, will take on Israel's Islamic Movement and Hamas.

Maariv reported that since Operation Cast Lead, 80,000 cubic meters of sewage from Gaza have been discharged daily into the Mediterranean, threatening to disrupt the operation of the desalination plant in Ashkelon.

HaQaretz reported that Israel Antiquities Authority researchers have re-exposed a stretch of road in Jerusalem dating to the Second Temple period that is believed to have been used by pilgrims on their ascent to the Temple. Existence of the 40-meter segment of road, cleared over the past few months to open it to visitors, has been known of for more than a century. The excavation is taking place in the neighborhood of Silwan near the Siloam Spring.

Visit of U.S. Special Envoy Sen. George Mitchell to Israel, PA

Block Quotes:

I. QFighting the Gatekeeper

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (9/14): QThe American designers of policy, who tend to sew the peace process according to the measures of the Israeli coalition, are blind to anything having to do with the limits within which Palestinian politics operates. Over and over they offer a quilt that is too short, but which keeps the Israelis warm, only to complain that the Palestinians are the ones getting cold feet. Proof of this can be found in an article by Aaron Miller, who served for many years as deputy to Dennis Ross in the American mediation team, and which was published in the Washington Post in May 2005. Under the title QIsrael's Lawyer,Q he wrote that QFor far too long, many American officials involved in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, myself included, have acted as Israel's attorney, catering and coordinating with the Israelis at the expense of successful peace negotiationsQ.... Israel promised seven years ago to freeze settlement construction, including that which was meant to meet natural growth, but at the White House they certainly know that Netanyahu's deputy, [Moshe] Ya'alon, argues that it is the Qright of every Jew to build a home -- in the middle of the Nablus casbah. This approach only causes a loss of Arab trust in the willingness of Israeli governments to do justice by the Palestinians; it mortally undermines their trust in the willingness of the Americans to use their power and influence in order to carry out U.S. interests in the region. If Obama is worried about fighting with the gatekeeper, and so lets Netanyahu rule the vineyard, we will all eat grapes of wrath.

II. QA Peace Plan Devoid of Contents

Former editor-in-chief Moshe Ishon wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (9/14): QAccording to European sources, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that within two years, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations regarding the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel will resume.... Beyond the American and Palestinians stances, it appears that most Israelis cannot endure the concessions to which Netanyahu is prepared to commit itself in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]. Anyway, his new proposals will not withstand the test of reality.

III. QJews Also Have a Nakba

Ron Breiman, a former chairman of the conservative group Professors for a Strong Israel, wrote in HaQaretz (9/14): QIn its 62nd year, Israel must decide between a Palestinian state or peace. A Palestinian side alongside Israel at the outset, but on its ruins in the future, is the diametric opposite of peace. Pushing toward such a state, and ignoring both common sense and the majority, rends the nation's fabric, and in itself sabotages the essential foundations of peace.

IV. QAssad Would Have Loved It

Columnist and former intelligence officer Amos Gilboa wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (9/14): QChecks done by the Americans with Assad personally and with his aides show that the document that [Ron] Lauder [a close confidant of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] presented [former U.S. President Bill] Clinton was not at all acceptable to the Syrians or to Netanyahu.... A passage in Dennis Ross's book [QThe Missing PeaceQ] raises the possibility that this is an internal draft paper in which he inserted the positions that had been presented to him by the Syrians. In other words, it is more or less a QSyrian paper,Q not a pledge by Netanyahu.

1V. QProtecting the Quarterback in the White House

Lenny Ben-David, who served as a senior diplomat in the Israeli Embassy in Washington and a member of AIPAC's staff in Washington and Jerusalem from 1992 to 1997, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (9/14): QYesterday's New York Times Magazine published the latest paean to J Street, portraying it as brash and brave, representative of 92 percent of American Jewry, and a young and open organization willing to take on a monolithic and Paleolithic AIPAC and other veteran American Jewish organizations.... One fact the Times magazine seems to get right: QJ Street shares the Obama administration's agenda.Q But the Times should have gone on to ask the nature of J Street's relationship with senior officials in the Obama administration.

VI. QIn the Middle East, Fear Trumps Popularity

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in The Jerusalem Post (9/14): QThis is the region's political style: Toughness counts; fear is better than popularity. In contrast to Western viewpoints, to concede or compromise shows weakness which means others will walk all over you. Of course, this is precisely how they view the West's sensitivity and apologies. QConfidence-buildingQ measures become contempt-building measures. Many Western leaders and much of the Western intelligentsia are like people sleeping through a burglary. Not only are their friends trying to wake them up, so are -- however inadvertently -- their enemies.

VII. QArea C Illegalities

The Jerusalem Post editorialized (9/14): QThe right-wing organization Regavim has launched a campaign to force the government to issue and implement demolition orders against illegal Palestinian construction in Area C of the West Bank, which is entirely under Israeli military and administrative control.... Regavim's claim that it is demanding equality for Jews vis-`-vis Palestinians in the development of land resources in Area C is misleading. By and large, the Israeli government is not offering a reasonable alternative to the Palestinians in Area C other than to build illegally at the risk of having their homes demolished. Prime Minister Netanyahu has embraced the vision of Israel and a demilitarized Palestinian state living peacefully side by side. He has vowed to drive a hard bargain on the division of disputed territory, but his hierarchy is holding to an unreasonable formula as regards Palestinian building, even in areas where Israel does not envision maintaining control. A more nuanced approach is overdue.

CUNNINGHAM